

2 Timothy 1:3-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/2tim/2tim-1/2-timothy-13-7/>

Paul does not want Timothy to shrink back from following in his footsteps, even if it will lead to imprisonment and death, as it will for Paul. Paul reminds Timothy of the character of his grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice, both of whom are strong believers in Jesus. Paul also reminds Timothy of a special gift God gave him, that he keep the flame alive and use this gift to serve God, because God has not made us to be cowards, but to be strong, loving, and wise.

Paul reflects on his life, the purpose God and Christ called him to, to preach the gospel and serve as an ambassador for God, reconciling sinful men to Him through faith in Jesus. It is a special purpose, one which Timothy was also given, and Paul does not want Timothy to abandon that calling through fear of rejection by the world. Paul has suffered for Christ without shame, for he fully believes Jesus will reward him on the Day of Judgment.

Paul now begins the body of his letter. He begins by saying *I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day*. Paul prays for Timothy *night and day*. Paul says *I constantly remember you*. The welfare of Timothy and his ministry never leaves Paul's mind. He thinks of it *constantly*. This might well be due to the fact that Paul considers Timothy to be the successor to his leadership in the ministry of taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul adds that the *God* that he thanks is the *God whom I serve with a clear conscience*. He likely added this description as an example and challenge to Timothy, whom he will, by this letter, exhort to live in such a way as to have a *clear conscience* before God as well. Paul serves God *with a clear conscience* in the same manner that his *forefathers did*. Paul does not mention which *forefathers* he has in mind in saying this. But as Timothy's spiritual father, he is likely setting up an example for Timothy, his son in the faith. Paul is Timothy's forefather. So, just as Paul followed his *forefathers*, so he will exhort Timothy to follow his example.

Paul also says he is *longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy*. Paul would be *filled with joy* if he could see Timothy in person. He will tell Timothy in chapter 4, "Make every effort to come to me soon." (2 Timothy 4:9). Paul does not explain why Timothy had *tears* when he was last in Paul's presence. We might guess that Timothy's *tears* were because he realized that Paul was going to die, and no longer be on earth to mentor him. But it seems clear there is a true bond of fellowship between Paul and Timothy, his son in the faith. Paul would be *filled with joy* to see Timothy, and Timothy was apparently filled with *tears* to see Paul in his suffering.

Paul then says *For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well*. Paul says he is *sure that* the same *sincere faith* which dwelt in his *mother and grandmother* is also within him. From the contents of this letter, it seems Paul has concern that Timothy will stay the course and finish the race courageously once Paul is gone.

But in other letters he expressed concern about himself enduring so as to win the prize of life (1 Corinthians 9:18, 27; Philippians 3:12), so it is natural he have the same concern for his *beloved son*. Paul knows firsthand that facing death for your testimony isn't easy, and wants to prepare his *beloved son* to embrace, and even be glad for the suffering and rejection he should expect in his future.

The word translated *sincere* is also translated "without hypocrisy" (as in Romans 12:9, NASB). Paul is confident that Timothy's behavior in his presence is the same conduct he will have when he is out of Paul's sight. He is not writing this letter of exhortation because he doubts that Timothy's faith and service has been duplicitous. As we will see, Paul is writing this to emphasize to Timothy the key perspectives he needs to keep in mind. Paul will soon be executed, and no longer be around to remind, so he wants to leave behind this letter to remind. We can infer that it was well received by Timothy, because he obviously circulated the letter to others, as it found its way into the New Testament. He could have just torn it up, and we never would have known its contents.

Paul's spiritual heritage came through his *forefathers*, while Timothy's spiritual heritage came through his *mother*. This is likely because Timothy's mother was Jewish, while his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1). After Timothy joined Paul and Silas on their missionary journey, Paul had Timothy circumcised, as a testimony to the Gentiles (Acts 16:3). This would indicate that Timothy's Jewish heritage was inherited through his mother. That Paul mentions by name Timothy's mother *Eunice* and grandmother *Lois* likely means that they were also friends and allies. Acts 16:1 says *Lois* "believed."

It seems Paul begins his letter by reminding Timothy that both he and Timothy are part of a spiritual lineage. They are part of a long line of people of faith. Paul then says *For this reason*, likely connecting Timothy to his spiritual heritage. Timothy has a familial heritage of faith, and he is adopted into Paul's spiritual heritage of faith, by reason of joining Paul in the ministry, as his spiritual son. Paul says *For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*.

Timothy is part of a long lineage of those who walked in faith, and he does not want to be the weak link in the chain. Which is a reason, even now, *to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*. It seems that Paul endowed Timothy with a *gift* of some sort, through the *laying on of his hands*. Paul mentions this gift in 1 Timothy:

"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery"
(1 Timothy 4:14).

So it seems the *gift* was a spiritual gift that Timothy received through the *laying on of hands* both by Paul as well as by the presbytery (the group of elders in the church). Paul does not describe the *gift*. It is clear it would have been known to Timothy. It could have been associated with a commissioning of leadership or position of service. Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to journey as missionaries by the church at Antioch by the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3).

Perhaps Paul does not describe the gift to benefit us, as those who read his letters for our own instruction; we can take his words to heart relative to our own gifts. The key point Paul makes is to use the *gift of God* with great courage. To be unafraid and unashamed to exercise the gifting. Paul exhorts Timothy to use his gifts courageously, *For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline*. This exhortation seems to be connected with the admonition for Timothy to *kindle afresh the gift of God*. The Greek word translated *kindle afresh* evokes the image of a blacksmith's fire being made hot by the blowing of air by means of a bellows. It means to "stoke the fire, and increase the zeal."

From the introduction, it does not seem Paul is concerned that Timothy's zeal has waned, but rather that Paul is simply recognizing that "gravity" is for "the fire to burn out." The smith's fire doesn't stay hot long enough to complete its work unless energy is continually added, in the form of fuel and oxygen (from the bellows). The principle seems to be "If you aren't adding zeal, you are losing zeal, so continually stoke the fire of your zeal."

In this case, the fire for the spiritual forge is that of the *spirit*, and that *spirit* is something *given to us by God*. *God has given us a spirit of power and love and discipline*. This *spirit* is like the wind giving oxygen to the fire by the bellows. The Greek word translated *spirit* is "pneuma" which also means "wind." In his choice of terms, Paul might literally have been drawing a picture of the *spirit* being like the wind of a bellows, stoking the fire of our zeal. This zeal looks like *power*.

Power is energy to act. To build and create. To engage in battle, or to defend. *God has given us a spirit* to do the work He appointed for us. But the *spirit* that *God has given us* is also a spirit of *love*. The word translated *love* is the Greek word "agape" which is one of several Greek words translated into English as "love." "Agape" love is about choosing to act. It is making value-based choices to serve the mission God gave us to benefit others. It is making a choice to follow in obedience to God. *Agape love* is what makes any action profitable, rather than unprofitable, in a true and lasting sense (1 Corinthians 13:3). *God has given us a spirit of power and love*, which means we have the fuel we need to do the work God assigned us.

But in order to apply the fuel of *power and love*, we also need *discipline*. The word translated *discipline* is translated in other versions as "sound mind," "self-discipline," "self-judgment," "self-control," or "wise discretion." It means self-governance, to make a choice to set aside our naturally-occurring appetites, and make a decision to act based on true values. This ability to govern self is also something *God has given us*. But it clearly requires an exercise of our will in order to apply these gifts. We must choose to do it. God provides all that is needed, but leaves it up to each one of us to decide whether to set aside self and sow to the spirit, or indulge self and sow to the flesh. This is a binary choice. As Paul told the Galatians:

"For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."
(Galatians 6:8)

In this verse from Galatians, "eternal life" is the reward of having a full experience of the gift of eternal life that believers are given when they are born again. We are gifted eternal life at our

spiritual birth (John 3:14-16), but we experience the blessings of the life we were given when we choose to sow to the Spirit.

It is both sobering as well as encouraging that Timothy, a co-author of scripture and co-laborer with the Apostle Paul, also must strive to retain his zeal, and remain strong in his faith. This tells us that this is a struggle we all have in common. It also tells us that there is never a point past which we can relax, and cease from striving to *kindle afresh* our gift, and choose to apply the *spirit that God has given us*.

Paul contrasts the spirit *God has given us of power, love, and discipline* with the spirit *God has not given us*. *God has not given us a spirit of timidity*. When we cave in to the world, or give in to the desire for comfort, or seek pleasure in physical circumstances rather than in fully exercising our spiritual gifts, then we are giving in to a *spirit of timidity*.

The word translated *timidity* can also be translated as “fear” or “cowardice.” One of the primary fears we need to cast aside is the fear of rejection by the world. Jesus encountered a tremendous amount of rejection. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that He despised the shame He faced. He felt the shame, but gave it no value, as compared to the “joy set before Him” to receive the reward from His Father for living in obedience. Paul will later tell Timothy to live life like a faithful soldier, and to engage in conflicts, with humility, advocating for the truth. Timothy should not worry about “what other people think of him.” There is no place for “being nice” so others will think well of us. Real love requires the exercise of *power* and of *discipline*. This will include speaking truth, teaching truth, and confronting with the truth.

The Bible is very deliberate about honoring courage and shaming cowardice (*timidity*). Sampson had few redeeming character traits, yet is noted in the “Hall of Faith” of Hebrews 11 as a positive example of faith. This can only be due to his great courage in engaging conflict. Revelation makes clear that cowardice is a trait that will bring shame and loss in the judgement, as “cowardly” is the first trait mentioned among a list of characteristics that will lead to judgement fire (Revelation 21:8).

Biblical Text

³ I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, ⁴ longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.